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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 000539

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/ARP, NEA/NGA

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TAGS: PREL PTER IZ KU UNSC

SUBJECT: (U) IRAQ: NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES' MEETING SUPPORTS  
POLITICAL TRANSITION

Classified By: CDA FRANK URBANCIC; REASON: 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Kuwait hosted the Fifth Conference of Foreign Ministers of the Neighboring Countries of Iraq February 14-15. The participation of the Iraqis for the first time, and the presence of UN Special Envoy Brahimi, minimized contentiousness and resulted in success, in the GOK view. The local press noted that the Iraqi flag flew over Kuwait for the first time since Liberation in 1991. The next meeting will be held in Egypt, probably in May. English version of final communique faxed to NEA/ARP. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Kuwait hosted the Fifth Conference of Foreign Ministers of the Neighboring Countries of Iraq February 14-15. Egypt and Bahrain (Arab League Chair) participated along with all the neighbors (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, and Iran). For the first time, Iraq also participated, on equal footing with the other countries (as the local press noted, this was the first time the Iraqi flag had flown over Kuwait since Liberation in 1991). All participating states were represented by their Foreign Ministers. UNSYG Annan was also represented, by his Special Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi. We have faxed the English version of the final communique to NEA/ARP.

¶3. (C) MFA International Organizations Dept. Deputy Director Amb. Aqeel Behbehani, who participated in the drafting committee, gave A/DCM a readout February 17. He said the atmosphere had been generally constructive and the GOK was very satisfied with the result. There was less contentiousness than at the last such meeting (in Damascus November 1-2), thanks largely to the participation of Iraq and the helpful presence of the UN's Brahimi. The GOK had coordinated its draft final communique with the Iraqis in advance, making it more difficult for other countries to quibble. Even so, the drafting committee had had to work until 2:00 a.m. February 15. Syria had been the most difficult. Behbehani highlighted the following points:

- Syria had wanted to insert language similar to that in the Damascus communique, rejecting measures that could lead to the division of Iraq. Saudi FM Prince Saud al-Feisal had helped fight off this initiative by noting that the first numbered paragraph reaffirmed the territorial integrity of Iraq.

- In numbered paragraph 2, Syria had changed the wording from "end of the occupation" to "withdrawal of occupying forces"; Iraq had not objected, so Kuwait had felt it could not either, though Behbehani considered the original wording to have been better, given that US and coalition forces will remain under a sovereign Iraqi government. He did not think the changed wording made much difference: once a sovereign Iraqi government is in office, the foreign forces will no longer be occupying powers.

- In numbered paragraph 4, Syria had adamantly rejected any specific mention of the November 15 agreement, even though it had voted for UNSCR 1511. Behbehani said he had jokingly asked the Syrian in the drafting committee: "what if we said we condemned the November 15 agreement, would you accept mention of it then?" and the Syrian had replied "no."

¶4. (C) The call for the UNSYG to convene the advisory group at ministerial level (numbered paragraph 10) had been unanimous. It was at Kuwait's initiative that the communique commended "the decision of the Iraqi people to bring the leaders of the previous regime...to justice" and called on all states to deny them safe haven. The GOK had appreciated Iraqi FM Zebari's expression of willingness to give written security guarantees to the neighbors.

¶5. (SBU) The conferees' meeting with the Amir, Crown Prince and Prime Minister was a de-rigueur courtesy call/photo op devoid of substance.

¶6. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.  
URBANCIC